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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that training in reflective process, a formal component of many teacher education programs, needs to occur also in counselor training programs, particularly in the practicum experience. A framework is proposed for reflective journaling as an integral component of the pre-service counseling practicum. The framework explains how a counselor can use reflection to provide a theoretical base for the articulation, analysis, and critique of a person's evolving professional development. While there are no definitive models of how the reflective process can be operationalized in a training program, this paper proposes that journals can be effective in either a structured or unstructured form: structured journals become teaching tools for introducing the reflective principles in practicum classes while unstructured journals are a form a narrative storytelling. This article presents two models of journals that have been used at one university, of which the first instructs students to write weekly using an open-ended format and the second provides more structure. Included are samples of acceptable brief and extended journal entries. So far, 24 students have completed reflective journals using the Model One format and have found the journals helpful in thinking about their practicum experience. It is noted that Model Two journals are in progress and while students are finding that they require a disciplined effort, the structure provides clearer guidelines. (NB)

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A Practicum in School Counseling:

Using Reflective Journals as an Integral Component

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A Practicum in School Counseling:
Using Reflective Journals as an Integral Component

Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993) noted that tomorrow's schools will be learning communities requiring empowered, reflective decision makers. Reflection, since it is so important, is a formal component of many teacher education programs and is fostered through specific experiences in coursework and in student teaching. Reflection however, should not be just for teachers. School counselors will also be members of these learning communities of the future. So, training in reflective process needs to occur also in counselor training programs, particularly in the practicum experience. Counselor educators are challenged to prepare students to deal with complex situations, the specific content of which we cannot predict. This paper proposes a framework for reflective journaling, based on the work of Donald Schon (1983, 1987), as an integral component of the pre-service counseling practicum.

Schon (1983) stated that situations do not present themselves as givens, but are constructed from events that are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. The practitioner must do a certain kind of work in making sense of a situation that relates to, but does not match, a previous situation or one modeled in training. For example, a counselor is asked to speak with a third grade immigrant child whose cheeks are very red. The child tells the counselor that her mother pinched her cheeks very hard because her homework was incomplete. The child presents further evidence of physical abuse. Through reflection, the counselor will use a repertoire of previous examples, images, understandings, and actions to reframe this troubling situation and then to generate problem solving actions (Schon,1987). This becomes a "self talk" process of articulating what Schon calls "knowing-in-action" and ultimately "theories in action." A central goal of reflection is to then bring these personal theories into more active awareness and to utilize them intentionally. Reflection thus provides a theoretical base

for the articulation, analysis, and critique of a person's evolving professional development.

There are no definitive models of how the reflective process can be operationalized in a training program. Formal components typically include reflective practicum experiences and journal writing. Journals are used to gather the needed information to analyze underlying thought, feeling, and action processes. Journals can be effective in either a structured or unstructured form. Structured journals become teaching tools for introducing the reflective principles in practicum classes. Unstructured journals are a form of narrative storytelling; the stories can later be analyzed for underlying values and assumptions (Mattingly, 1991). A concern with journal assignments has been giving students enough structure to learn a reflective process without being so prescriptive that the process becomes stifled (Canning, 1991).

Model One

Reflection seems to have the objective of teaching people how to synthesize to find points of similarity between present troublesome situations and previous theoretical knowledge and information, classroom instruction, and personal experiences. To this end Model One type journals have been assigned in three sections of counseling practicum at a mid-sized midwestern university over three semesters. The model instructs students to write weekly using an open ended format. The format consists of ideas for direction adapted from Canning (1991):

> The purpose of the practicum journal is to reflect on the process of growth and development as a counselor during the course of the practicum. Students should plan to write in the journal weekly, and journals will be collected at least once before the end of the term. This is an open ended assignment, and you may decide on your own format, but the following will give you some ideas for direction.
>
> Work to develop your own professional positions and your own voice through an active process of integrating the best advice from others (counseling classes, research, supervisors, peers), your own observations, past experience, what you believe is right or what you need to do, and your own goals related to what you want to happen and/or the counselor you want to become.

Write about something that is important to you - some important issue or problem in your counseling process that needs critical thinking, expanded awareness.

Look for connections or conflicts among pieces of knowledge about clients, issues presented, counseling skills that you are developing and your own goals, values, beliefs, and biases.

As you work in this process, affirm yourself for looking at what may be difficult for you (maybe your part in things that are not going well); for finding and building on things that are working for you; and for making progress on problems or in areas where you have decided to change and grow.

Model Two

Currently in progress is a model that is more structured and in depth, consisting of four steps. The assumption underlying the revised model is that the reflective journal should be a more integral part of the practicum. The model consists of four steps: *Raw Material* -- write daily in the journal for a minimum of one page; *Extended Entry* -- think about this particular situation and write down all similarities between it and previous data then, briefly formulate a hypothesis of how to view the situation and approach action; *Reflective Discussion* -- bring the extended entry to class and/or supervision and process it in terms of what happened and what was learned; *Retrospective* -- draw together material from steps one through threein a final paper which basically covers the material in the first model (Canning, 1991). The following outlines the process for students:

Step One:

Each practicum counselor will keep a journal, writing in it a minimum of one page per entry. The counselor will use the entries to work out the confusion, frustration, questions as well as the insights, hypotheses, possible interventions, and feelings of accomplishment that s/he is experiencing in dealing with a particular client. These entries should be very informal and should be written as soon as possible after the session, in order to get immediate impressions.

While it may be necessary to do an occasional brief summary of a session's content, the counselor must not devote very much time to summarizing the session: **Reflection does not mean retelling; it means thinking about**. A counselor may choose to write the weekly entries about the same client or s/he may write about different clients. The key is that the journal be a way for the counselor to do some self-talk.

The attached SAMPLE ONE is a model of what an acceptable brief journal entry might look like.

Step Two:

Each week, the counselor will reread the entries and write a 2-3 page extended journal entry which synthesizes, analyzes, and draws some tentative conclusions about the process s/he is experiencing with a particular client. This extended entry might include such phrases as:

I wonder if this is like...
This reminds me of...
I remember reading about this in...
This client's experience is like...
Perhaps X theory would work here because...

The counselor will bring both the brief entries and the extended entry to practicum class each week and will use them in peer supervision and practicum seminar .

The attached SAMPLE TWO is a model of what an acceptable extended journal entry might look like.

SAMPLE ONE

J.L. spent most of the session today talking about how angry she gets at her son when he refuses to clean his room. I can't help but think about my own reaction to the same thing: maybe it's a universal problem: teenagers WILL have messy rooms and it WILL drive their parents crazy. I am usually thinking to myself as I'm listening to her that her son sounds pretty normal to me.

So then I wonder about the reason for her anger being so strong. She says that she grounds her son from watching television for a week if his room doesn't meet her standards when she has her weekly Saturday morning inspections.

Another thing that's very frustrating in dealing with J.L. is that she talks so much and so fast. Whenever I try to get her to focus on one particular aspect of her monologue, she tries but she can't stay on the topic for very long. In addition, she gives a lot of "I said...and then he said..." statements. And when I try to get her to talk about how the events make her feel, she can't or won't do it. For example, in today's session she told me that her son deliberately left dirty dishes and uneaten food under his bed. As she spoke, her voice was trembling and she kept pounding her fist on her leg. "Wow," I said, "that must have made you feel pretty angry." Her response was "What I "felt" is that this kid is going to clean up this room before he gets his supper tonight." How can I get her to acknowledge and talk about her anger?

SAMPLE TWO

After rereading my journal entries for this week, I get a sense of how frustrated I'm getting at J.L. I'm beginning to understand what my Theories instructor meant when she said that it's not enough to listen and empathize. We're not getting anywhere! So what do I do to get her to slow down and think about what she's saying and to do a little self-analysis of WHY it's so important to her that her son always have a clean room?

I remember Tom, a friend from my Group I class, telling me about a session he had with one of his Practicum I clients. He listened to his guy talk for twenty minutes about all the different things he and his girl friend did one weekend: "First, we had breakfast at the Mall at the nice new cappucino place. Have you been there? Try the Swiss mocha. Then we went looking for a pair of

blue jeans for her. It takes her forever, man. I could buy ten pairs in the time it takes her to find one....on and on and on like that. Tom said he got so frustrated and bored that he finally said, "My God, man, get to the point!" His practicum instructor was obviously not very pleased with Tom's response.

But apparently the instructor then gave Tom some tips about what to say and do the next time the client got carried away. She told him to interrupt, saying something like "Yea, it can be frustrating to be along with someone who's a very careful shopper, but I'd like to go back to something you said a few minutes ago."

That sounds like good advice to me. I'm going to try something similar with J.L. My guess is that I'll have to keep at it all the time, pulling her back to the issues that I think are the relevant ones and not allowing her to spend all our time in rather idle chit chat.

It might sound like this: "Hmm, sounds like finding that food in your son's room was pretty irritating to you. It makes me think of something you said just a minute ago. Can we go back to that?...." Something like that.

Discussion

Currently 24 students have completed reflective journals utilizing a Model One format. Students have found the journals helpful in thinking about the practicum experience more fully and what it means in terms of their professional development. The instructor has found it helpful in better understanding the students' felt experience of practicum. The concern with this model, identified by Canning (1991), is it's lack of sufficient structure. Model Two journals are in progress and while students are finding that they require a disciplined effort, the structure provides clearer guidelines. In addition discussion about the extended entries has been of high quality.

Much of what has been formalized as the reflective process involves answering basic questions about practice: what do I do?; how do I do it?; and ultimately what does this mean, both for myself as a professional and for those whom I serve? Reflection, as it is developed in the literature, offers various frameworks for the articulation, analysis and critique of one's developing professional autobiography. As noted by Kottkamp (1990) writing as a product leaves a trail of the evolution of ideas as a form of long term feedback and is often a reflective process in itself. Counseling is a field with many formal theoretical approaches. This plethora of approaches can often be confusing as practicum students deal with that first "real" situation. However, reflection helps in defining and articulating one's "theories-in-action", those values,

beliefs, and concepts that guide decision making. It is an emergent process that goes beyond just defining oneself as, for example, a Rogerian or an eclectic counselor. By using their own versions of reflection, beginning counselors can experience their initial struggles as a positive step on the road of professional growth.

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